

Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary (OCNMS)
Advisory Council (AC or SAC)
Tourism Working Group
DRAFT Final Report May 2014

Tourism Working Group Members

Les Bolton (Chair) – SAC Tourism / Economic Development alternate
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Alan Rammer – SAC Marine Resources Committee alternate
Lora Leschner – SAC Conservation alternate
Lissy Andros – Forks Chamber of Commerce
Alec Bartolai – Kalaloch Lodge
Willie Nelson – Go All Points Tours
Carolyn Wilcox – Experience Olympic
Brice Boland – Surfrider
Sandy Tsiang – Winter Summer B&B
Shenna Straling – Port Angeles Chamber of Commerce
Robert Steelquist – (Staff Lead) OCNMS Education Coordinator
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Purpose

The overall purpose of the Tourism Working Group (TWG) was to identify opportunities for OCNMS to serve visitors to the Olympic Peninsula, to support, as appropriate, the regional tourism industry and tourism enterprises and to enhance awareness of and protection of OCNMS resources.

Specifically, the group focused on opportunities consistent with two drivers:

1. The Visitor Services Action Plan (C3) of the 2011 OCNMS Final Management Plan
2. The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) “*Campaign of Engagement*”

Background

Tourism is a major economic driver in the Olympic Coast region. Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary (OCNMS, or sanctuary) has a tremendous opportunity to showcase the marine environment as a tourism amenity, to partner with other agencies and organizations to promote the region and to provide services to enhance the visitor experience. The sanctuary’s mission to promote Ocean Literacy in the 2011 OCNMS Final Management Plan is included in its Visitor Services Action Plan. Through this action plan, OCNMS aims to improve awareness that fosters a sense of stewardship and facilitates sustainable use of marine and sanctuary resources. Additionally, President Obama’s Executive Order on Tourism directs federal agencies, particularly resource management agencies, to create tourism strategies. In 2012 leadership within Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) developed a “*Campaign of Engagement*,” a conceptual framework to build a constituency across the sanctuary system. The campaign focuses on the role of sanctuaries to develop and promote tourism and visitor services emphasizing the unique values of place at the site level.

A Tourism Working Group was formed by the OCNMS Advisory Council (AC) in 2013 to gather information from a broad range of businesses and other interested parties and recommend ways for OCNMS to engage with the tourism private sector. Members from the tourism sector outside the AC were recruited to provide their on-the-ground perspectives. The TWG held meetings via teleconference

and membership represented the entire region of the Olympic Peninsula. Members were asked to survey local tourism experts using a questionnaire and to report back from their discussions or responses (see list of survey questions below). Responses of TWG members and others interviewed were shared and discussed during conference call meetings and a summary of all results.

Survey Questions:

1. What is the main type of tourism attraction in your region? (examples: charter fishing, coastal backpacking, beachcombing, etc.)
2. Describe the recreation users that visit your region?
3. What service(s) and/or infrastructure exist(s) in your region for natural/cultural tourism? Do you perceive a demand from tourists to expand or increase natural/cultural education?
4. How do you feel Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary could better engage with the private sector in increasing awareness and tourism use of the sanctuary?
5. Given legal limitations that prevent federal agencies from promoting one business over another, how could Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary play a better role in supporting the visitor services private sector? (examples: technical information, training, publications, web or social media applications, etc.)
6. What recommendations would you make to Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary for developing its own programs to complement the private sector?

Using all resulting ideas, a ranking spreadsheet was developed to review all proposed strategies considering a number of criteria which included: impact or number of people reached; cost or resource efficiency in terms of opportunities required shifting existing staff workloads; relevancy to OCNMS visitor service goals; opportunities that supported partnership or other initiatives; implementation time and feasibility.

The working group recommendations are listed below in two levels of recommended prioritization, with six action items listed as top recommendations for the Advisory Council to review and propose forwarding to Sanctuary Superintendent. Each option carries opportunities and challenges that were discussed among TWG members.

Top Tier Recommendations

The following six recommendations represent the Tourism Working Group's highest-rated strategies. They received the most support because they were considered opportunities that can be realized at relatively low cost while having a broad impact.

Support Stewardship Tourism

1. Help develop and disseminate a comprehensive listing of volunteer and stewardship opportunities within the region. Partners could include other resource agencies (NPS, USFWS etc) as well as non-profits (CoastSavers, COASST, NatureBridge etc).
2. Promote citizen science as a tourism amenity in the region. Specifically promote sanctuary-linked programs including COASST and CoastSavers, in ways that encourage the involvement of visitors, not just residents.

Support Tourism Businesses

3. Use OCNMS social media (website and Facebook page) to highlight activities that will be attractive to visitors. Focus on the activities themselves, not the specific businesses.
6. List nature-based tour operators on sanctuary's website.

Sponsor Events that Attract Tourism

4. Bring science programs, research, conferences to the OP and encourage families to view it as a place to visit.

Collaborate with Regional Tourism Organizations

5. Present at and participate in the annual Olympic Peninsula Tourism Summit, held each year in mid-October.

Other Recommendations (Lower Priority)

In addition, the following recommendations are included in order to reflect the breadth of comments furnished by working group members and their respective contacts. All strategies considered are included below for future consideration with brief comments where there was significant discussion. They represent the TWG's lower-ranking strategies, yet have potential for realization given appropriate funding and staffing resources if such opportunities arise to OCNMS in the future.

Support Tourism Media

- OCNMS to produce news bulletins, news stories, or announcements that highlight visitor activities in the sanctuary on regular basis.
- OCNMS should produce and distribute sanctuary informational handouts, rack cards, etc. (include QR codes) and make more universally available. TWG members questioned effectiveness of paper literature and cited costs of production and distribution.
- OCNMS should deploy a webcam in the sanctuary which can be linked to own and partners' websites. TWG members recognized associated costs and infrastructure problems. Other organizations already provide this service.
- OCNMS to provide text/ videos/ slideshow to existing kiosks/ screens/ televisions of partnering locations.
- OCNMS to prepare media advisories to attract and facilitate travel journalists/ FAM tours for travel writers.
- OCNMS to send targeted letters about the sanctuary to Olympic Peninsula businesses (with any available literature/ brochures/ rack cards).
- OCNMS to review area websites to update their existing sanctuary information, or request that businesses and partners add a link to OCNMS (with information/photos) to their website.
- OCNMS should develop a self-served traveling exhibit to rotate among various businesses on Olympic Peninsula. TWG members acknowledged CoastSavers effort underway and suggested that OCNMS participate and gauge its effectiveness.
- OCNMS should install a permanent exhibit/panel at Clallam Bay rest stop. TWG members acknowledged this as a costly investment, given funding limitations.
- OCNMS continue to maintain a visible presence at regional festival and events on Olympic Peninsula (education booth). TWG members recognized that OCNMS already participates in many community events, but the group supported OCNMS continuing this activity.
- OCNMS to create outreach events and public spectacles with tall ships or research vessels.

Support Tourism Businesses

- OCNMS to provide informational fact sheets and/or training on topics of interest (eg. shoreline whale-watching, tidepooling, marine biology/ecology, etc.).
- OCNMS to host 1 day workshop targeting lodges and the business industry to present information and all nature-based tourism opportunities on OP.
- OCNMS should support local and tribal interpretive staff during peak season and spring break at strategic locations such as Cape Flattery, Ruby Beach, Kalaloch Beach, etc.

- OCNMS should increase presence in the coastal communities associated with tourism leaders/representatives.
- Support Clallam Transit access to public transportation (international backpackers) and routing options during peak seasons (Memorial Day to Labor Day weekends) and holidays; support OCNMS and partners' communication of public transportation options to Olympic Peninsula.

Recommendation

At this time, the Tourism Working Group (TWG) recommends that OCNMS devote staff time and energy to initiate the top prioritized recommendations as follows:

- Strengthen and create new partnerships with other natural resource agencies to help develop and promote volunteer tourism and stewardship opportunities in the region
- Continue citizen science programs and look to develop other citizen science opportunities that can engage visitors rather than just residents
- Increase use of social media for OCNMS and related activities attractive to visitors, focusing on activities and outreach opportunities rather than specific businesses
- Include nature-based tour operators on sanctuary's website in a way that is legal and appropriate for OCNMS
- Partner on working to bring science programs, research and conferences to the Olympic Peninsula, encouraging participants and their families to visit the area in conjunction
- Participate and present at annual Olympic Peninsula Tourism Summit in mid-October through Olympic Peninsula Visitor Bureau

Over time and given availability of staff and/or financial resources, OCNMS should consider working on other ideas from the Tourism Working Group.